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(Being a Lecture delivered in the Mechanics' Institute,
Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony, by Henry Glasse.)

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SOCIALISM THE REMEDY.

A Lecture delivered at the Mechanics' Institute, Port Elizabeth, Cape Colony, by Henry Glasse.

Socialism is a theoretic system which proposes to remedy the evils of existing society, and it begins by asserting that our present social system, the arrangements under which people live, the relations they bear to one another, the laws and usages which bind and constrain them are wrong, unjust and hurtful; because they do not conduce to human happiness, but, on the contrary, entail suffering on a large number of persons and interfere more or less with the wellbeing of all.

Our present social system, this commercial and industrial form of society under which we live, has as its main characteristic the division of the people into two classes: the haves and the have-nots; on the one side those who possess everything that is needed for the production of the necessities of life, on the other those who have nothing but their powers of mind and body, and who consequently have to crave permission to use those powers on the property of the possessing class, a permission only granted under conditions eminently favorable to the latter.

Under the feudal system which immediately preceded the present one, the tenants or serfs attached to their lord's estate were allowed to cultivate portions of ground for their own benefit on condition of working a certain number of days for him and for his exclusive profit. Under the present system this is altered; instead of the landlord compelling his tenant to plough or sow his

(the landlord's) private domain, he simply exacts rent; he takes, that is, money instead of service, and in so doing he is the gainer, for he ceases to share with his tenant any risk with regard to the market or the season, he has to get so much money and he takes it, any loss occurring through scarcity of crops or other misfortune has to be borne by the tenant alone. This is the simplest form in which the division of classes manifests itself; but there are other forms which really are of exactly the same nature. The first distinction between rich and poor having originated in the appropriation of the land by certain individuals, and these individuals having thereby amassed wealth, a number of them or their sons or persons to whom they lend a portion of their wealth proceed to devote it to industrial purposes, and, if they themselves worked on the materials which they had thus procured, they would indeed make a very decent living; but they would not be able to amass wealth in their turn, and that is precisely what they desire to do—and to do more rapidly than the landlord even. Around them they see a vast crowd of persons who have nothing but their labor to offer in exchange for the necessities of life; here is their opportunity and they avail themselves of it. Without doing a stroke of productive work themselves here is the royal road to the constant increase of their wealth and, consequently, to their continued advancement in power and social position. The process is simple: they know the average amount of value which these "hands" can by their labor or skill add to the raw materials set before them, and then offer them a less amount as wages; the balance is theirs and goes to augment their pile. This profit is a surplus which, though made by the worker, is pocketed by the employer who, in fact, employs him only in order to get something more out of him than the equivalent of what he pays him. In this manner inequality is maintained and the two classes of owners and masters on the one hand and of toilers and slaves on the other are not only perpetuated, but the abyss between them is constantly deepened.

Here is the significance of the "brazen law of wages" which will not allow wages to rise permanently beyond what is barely necessary to support the worker's life and strength and enable him to breed children to inherit his slavery. The same brazen law will not, it is true, allow the worker to receive permanently less than this minimum, for the simple reason that unless men have a certain amount of strength they cannot work, and if they cannot rear families their class dies out. This is evident; but it

may not seem to some persons so clear that wages cannot permanently rise beyond the average mentioned. Yet, if we ask ourselves why it is that wages are extra good in a particular place or trade, we shall soon observe that it is because labor is scarce in that place or line of work, and that therefore higher wages are offered in order to attract more workers, which, in time, it is bound to do, either by drawing men from other lands where wages are lower, or by inducing a larger number of persons to take up the trade which demands more hands and offers more money.

It is to the division of mankind into rich and poor that we may rightly attribute the vast proportion of the evils with which society is cursed. Society, indeed! what a shocking misuse of the word. The word "society" means by its derivation a union of comrades and partners. What irony! I ask in the name of common sense: Does this monstrous agglomeration of rich and poor, high and low show much comradeship or partnership? Does the lord or the squire regard the village folk as his comrades? Does the manufacturer or the trader treat his operatives or his customers as his partners? The idea is ludicrous; yet it is sad to see the world so different from what it would be if it were only constituted in accordance with its name.

However, let us use the word "society" in default of a better one, and let us return to what has been already asserted, namely, that the evils which afflict humanity are mainly the consequence of this division of classes into rich and poor, and that they mostly result directly or indirectly from luxury or from poverty, or at least from the fear of poverty or the desire for luxury. The evils referred to are specially: Crime, Ignorance and Disease.

Let us consider the first of these, Crime. The great bulk of legal offences are offences against property. A man is poor and in need of something, so he robs another, finding that to be the easiest way of satisfying his want; perhaps he does the same thing repeatedly, and if so he finally becomes a confirmed thief glorying in his smartness. Would he in the first place have taken to stealing if he had not been pressed by want? Not in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. Or a man, who has not the excuse of poverty, embezzles funds with which he is entrusted, or takes part in some swindle; what makes him do so? Is it not in the great majority of cases the longing to put himself out of the danger of a possible descent into poverty—to escape from the fear of reverses or bad times which is such a worry to many persons in apparently comfortable and even prosperous circumstances,

or else is it not the desire to vie in luxury or ostentation with others higher than himself in the social scale, and possessing ampler means? As for crimes against the person, crimes of violence, by far the greater number are committed for the purpose of obtaining the property of another, and are thus connected with theft and robbery. The balance can mostly be attributed to a brutality which is bred of ignorance, another evil which is maintained by existing social conditions.

Ignorance is readily associated with poverty; for how can he who is constantly engaged in the struggle for daily bread, and who has to employ all his time and all his wits in solving the problem how to exist, how can he be expected to improve his mind and enlarge his faculties by reading and reflection, or by attentively listening to truths intelligently expressed? It is too much to expect of such a one, and there are millions of such.

Disease is in the vast majority of cases the result of insanitary conditions, unsuitable food, deficient clothing, damp, overcrowded and ill-ventilated lodgings, exposure to extremes of weather, overwork or too much confinement, or again it is often due to worry and anxiety. Poverty subjects the poor to all these evils, while luxury at the opposite social pole—luxury which is the scourge of many among the rich, leads them to disease through the vices and excesses which it engenders. Therefore, the division of classes which is the fundamental law and inherent element of bourgeois, middle class society, the society of today, is responsible for practically all the evils which afflict humanity, exception being made of evils which are purely natural and which do not depend upon man, his habits or his institutions.

Before stating the manner in which Socialism proposes to remedy the unnatural and artificial evils wherewith man in his ignorance or perversity has thought fit to afflict himself and his fellow man, let us first examine certain other professed cures for these same evils, cures which have been laid before the world with authority and seeming sincerity.

Many have taught that Christianity would save the world; they have held that the precepts and example of Christ, and a sense of the brotherhood of men under a common Father, together with the salutary influence of a number of holy men counselling and directing the Christian flock, would of necessity so work on men's hearts and so mould their characters that, without any interference with the existing social order, all things would be rendered harmonious and sweet peacefulness, neighbourly love

and heavenly charity unite all classes, all conditions in one holy happy family. The Christian religion in its varying forms has now predominated throughout the civilised world for at least one thousand years; but do we yet see anything like the picture which has been presented to us of its beneficent effects? After one thousand years of Christian rule, does not the Christian usurer still exact his interest to the uttermost farthing? Is business any the less business because of Religion? Is there more humanity in man's treatment of his fellow man, more honesty in his dealing with his neighbours? Is not the religious man as hard a man to deal with as any, and has he not to be as carefully watched as any? There is one saying in the *New Testament* which I think must be purely ironical and intended to be taken in a contrary sense, and that is: "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." If there is, however, one scriptural quotation which is *not* ironical but strictly and to the letter true and proven, it is that other saying of the founder of Christianity: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth, I came not to send peace but a sword;" and certainly from the time that the Christian church became the dominant party in the old Roman empire, the sword of the warrior has never been far from the gown of the priest. Read the history of the crusades and follow on through the records of long centuries of devastating wars, always will you find the same story, even down to this present Chinese war waged to avenge and protect missionaries or to acquire and exploit new markets and forcibly push fresh trade—which is it? Probably both, but especially the latter; for the missionary with his cross or his bible, as the case may be, is the pioneer, next follows the soldier with his flag and then the trader with his trickery.

If it be objected that Religion has not had a fair trial, or that it has hitherto been misunderstood, and that it still has its mission of reforming and regenerating the world before it, I can only say that it is late in the day to come with that tale; surely those who were nearest to its origin and to whom its teaching came with more directness must have had the best means of learning its true inwardness and understanding what was or was not in accordance with its spirit. Thus it is vain for new teachers to arise with new interpretations; and if at a time when the churches had a practically universal control over the civilised conscience they were so powerless to reform social abuses as we know them to have been, what can we expect from them now

that they are more and more losing that control and are regarded with indifference or hostility by a constantly increasing section of the people?

Others come forward and say:

"The reason why there is so much distress in the world is that there are too many people, the labor market is glutted; let the poor have fewer children and then there will not be the same competition among working men in the future, wages will go up and there will be a general increase of comfort among the people." The first who publicly announced this remedy was a Church of England clergyman named Malthus, who, by the way, was himself the father of eleven children; he proposed that men should not marry till they were fifty years of age, unless they possessed ample means. Now we need not enquire how a preacher and expounder of the scriptures could venture to advise people to go against the bible command: "Be ye fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth," we need only say that if a man does not marry until he is fifty years of age he may as well leave matrimony alone altogether, for he will certainly be well used to do without it. But the present day disciples of Malthus have either a truer understanding of human nature, or else they are less afraid of shocking people; for, while they counsel prudence in the begetting of children and recommend small families, they do not discountenance marriage, on the contrary they advise it together with the use of prudential checks on the birth-rate. Now there is much in Malthusianism that is worthy of attention, and parents of limited means should be careful not to bring into the world more children than they can bring up properly; but this limitation of the family cannot be accepted as a means of curing social ills or eradicating poverty, because if all the poor adopted this method it would lose its efficacy, no one would have the advantage in this respect over others, and wages would inevitably fall because a lower average wage would be required to keep the worker and his family, he could afford to work for less and his employers would see that he did so. The Brazen Law of Wages would come into operation as surely as the Law of Gravitation brings down the apple loosened from the tree. Moreover, the wage-slave even if he has fewer companions remains none the less a wage-slave, he does not thereby acquire a jot more hold on the lands, buildings and industrial appliances owned by his master. The limitation of the family, though a wise precaution on the part of sensible men desirous of doing the best they can for them-

selves and those immediately about them in the present struggle for existence, is incapable of freeing society at large from the evils under which it groans. We must therefore examine another remedy.

Political rights are often invoked as a means of deliverance; many say: "Let the workers combine to elect representatives who will legislate in their interest and who, being heartily in sympathy with their electors, will steadily work so as to counteract existing evils by legal and constitutional means, then everything will be all right." Many years ago the remark was made that representative government was on its trial; looking at its results we are justified in adding that it has already been tried and found wanting. The poet Longfellow makes his Miles Standish say: "If you wish a thing to be well done you must do it yourself, you must not leave it to others"; and besides, this theory presupposes that the electors are really free men, free in their minds at least, whereas it is evident that a vast number of men are not mentally free, and that for the workers to be able to obtain a majority of representatives to really champion their interests in the legislature it would be absolutely necessary that this vast number should be earnest and active on their side; experience, however, shows that under existing conditions this is hopeless. The fear men have of injuring their circumstances by advocating opinions which are abominated by their social superiors, the prejudices inculcated by such education as they have been allowed to receive, the conservative influence brought to bear by the clergy of the various religious bodies, an unwillingness to bother themselves about anything which does not at once put money into their pockets, a very natural feeling of weariness and disgust with the past results of political action in consequence of their having seen the promises made by candidates forgotten as soon as these are safely in their seats—all these influences and many others keep a very large number of working men back from entering upon politics with a view to asserting their interests and claims. How can one expect men subjected to all these powerful influences and crushed by them into a hopelessly slavish state of mind, to wake up to a sense of real freedom at those rare moments when they are permitted to record their votes? It is not that these people would refuse desirable changes, they would eagerly grasp at any amelioration of their lot, but it would have to be given to them first, they will take it gladly if it comes, but they will not work for it; and, indeed, they do not seriously hope for

it. This section of the people which is necessary to give the cause of Labor a parliamentary majority will, it is to be feared, never do so. In Germany, in France, and in the United States there is universal suffrage and a large labor party, yet there is no prospect of that party obtaining power by parliamentary methods. It is certain also that if the ruling class really saw any immediate danger of its power being overthrown by that of the combined working classes, it would without hesitation make such changes in our political institutions or in the administration of them as would defeat any such attempt. Let us take to heart the bitter lesson taught by History: we have no rights as soon as our social masters fear that they will be used to their detriment; a certain pretence of liberty is granted, liberty of the press, liberty of speech, etc., etc., so long as it leads to no practical results, because as our rulers say, it acts as a safety-valve and lets people blow off steam, and, what is of equal importance, shows exactly the state of public feeling and so enables the authorities to judge when it may be advisable to make some useless or petty concession or else to take vigorous repressive measures for what is called "the public safety." Representative government, the vote, has been called the Grand Mystification of the nineteenth century; shall it go on mystifying us through the twentieth? It is for the enlightened section of the people, the men of intelligence, heart and spirit to decide.

It now remains to state the Socialistic solution. The point on which all Socialists are agreed is that the land with all its natural contents and products, together with all the materials and instruments of labor—all things which are either the free gift of Nature to Man or the creations of labor past or present, and which are now held by the capitalist class and worked by Labor in the interest of Capital—must be appropriated by the whole people willing to co-operate, and be worked in the interest of all. Briefly put, the solution is the socialisation of all the land and of the materials and instruments of labor.

The result of this will be that the distinction of classes will vanish and, likewise, the opposition between Capital and Labor; the worker sharing in the social work of his comrades will be a joint partner with them in the universal human patrimony, the wealth of the world will belong to the people of the world.

How will this public property, this social wealth be used? In other words: What will be the future organisation of labor? The answer to this will depend on the people themselves and upon the

varying circumstances of time and place in which they find themselves. Thus it is practically certain that the system will vary in different localities according to the temperament and character of distinct races of men, and according to the prevailing industries of different regions, which will be varied as they now are by circumstances of climate, soil, natural products and geographical position. The watchword of the Social Revolution will be: "Peasant, seize the land; workman, seize the factory!" In some places persons may choose to cultivate each his plot of ground separately and with the aid of his family; there need be no interference with those who choose to do so, only in this case they must themselves use the share of the common property which they hold, they must not let it out to others on rent or hire; that is to say they must not, as is now done, employ it for the purpose of making something out of the labor of others. In other places people may choose to work the land as they will work the factories and other large productive enterprises by combining their labor on large tracts of ground and arranging among themselves all the details of the work and the conditions under which they will live and associate, contriving so as to combine the maximum of production with the minimum of exertion, so as to secure comfort and even affluence without overwork. We cannot foresee what choice people will make under such entirely new and happy conditions as the Social Revolution will of necessity bring us; but we may feel perfectly assured that, as everyone will be free and the interest of all will be the concern of each, experience will correct any defects, and that those who use the more successful methods of working and adopt the best modes of living will by their example teach others, who will have every inducement to imitate where imitation would be to their advantage. That which separates men is inequality of means and competition in the race for wealth; that which will unite them is Communism, which is the essence of Socialism, all the benefits of co-operation and good-fellowship can be realised by it and by it alone. The land, its contents and spontaneous productions belong to all who will use them honestly and not so as to enslave or crush others, and all the rest belongs to the workers by reason of their producing it. All wealth therefore does in justice belong to labour.

But you may ask: How can we get a majority in order to bring about this necessary, this salutary revolution? We have not to wait for any such majority; if we had, then indeed we might despair of the realisation of our desires. What we need

is a sufficient and efficient minority, a minority sufficient in numbers and more particularly in energy and resolution. All the great changes of the past have been the result of the action of resolute minorities, the majority comes in afterwards to set the seal of its approval on the changes wrought by earnest men. We must remember that not all men are earnest partisans of any side; there are a certain number of individuals determined to keep things as they are, and there is also another growing number determined to work and fight for better things; but between these two parties there is a very large number of persons who have no enthusiasm either way, these give a certain passive support to the existing state of things because it is the only one they see. They will, however, make no serious effort to maintain it, and when once they see it seriously assailed they will think of altering their position. As has been said before, people belonging to this large category are quite willing to accept any improvement of their lot, provided always they do not have to work for it. It is to men of a different temper that we appeal, and when a sufficient number of such men have been won over to Socialism we shall be ready to use the opportunities which history shows us are never long in presenting themselves to those that desire them.

Camille Desmoulins, a well-known writer and prominent figure in the great French revolution of last century, has said: "There were hardly a dozen of us Republicans in Paris before 1789;" yet a few months after the success of the revolution which began in that year, the armies of republican France were over-running monarchical and feudal Europe. It was not a majority of Republicans which made the great revolution of last century, but it was that revolution which created the Republican majority.

Similarly, the coming Social Revolution will make a Socialist world.

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